



Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930

Author(s): Alexandra Minna Stern

Source: *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (Feb., 1999), pp. 41-81

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2518217>

Accessed: 13-08-2016 18:52 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Hispanic American Historical Review*

Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910–1930

Alexandra Minna Stern

Let's start with a building. The foundations of this two-story red-brick structure were laid in 1910 alongside and partially underneath the Santa Fe Street Bridge, which spans the Rio Grande between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso (see fig. 1). Initially designed as a site where “every arrival from Mexico” was to be “bathed with soft soap and warm water,” this disinfection plant and the bridge leading to it became the stage of violent confrontation seven years later.¹ During 1916, reports of epidemics ravaging Mexico, ongoing military showdowns between Mexican revolutionaries and United States troops, and a heightened concern with disease and contamination prompted the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and Bureau of Immigration to enlarge the building. Over the course of 1916 approximately \$6,000 was spent remodeling the plant, including the installation of boilers and streamlined disinfection equipment.²

Research for this article was generously supported by an Albert J. Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association, a Research Travel Grant from the History Department at the University of Chicago, and a Social Science Research Council International Migration Dissertation Fellowship. The original version of this paper was presented as part of the 1996–97 Sawyer Seminar entitled “Nation, Community, and Culture in the Aftermath of Empire” at the Advanced Study Center of the International Institute, University of Michigan. I would like to thank all the participants and the organizers, Ann Stoler and Nicholas Dirks, for their insights and criticisms. I have also benefited from the critical readings of Sander Gilman, María Teresa Koreck, Barbara Berglund, Gabriela Arredondo, Howard Markel, Marty Pernick, and the editors—especially Gil Joseph—and anonymous referees of the *HAHR*. A special word of thanks is due to two archivists who graciously provided expertise and assistance: Claudia Rivers, Head of Special Collections at the University of Texas at El Paso, and John Parascandola, Public Health Service Historian, United States Public Health Service, Rockville, Maryland.

1. *El Paso Herald*, 21 July 1910, p. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, 27–28 Jan. 1917, p. 2.

Claude C. Pierce, one of 12 senior surgeons at the apex of the USPHS hierarchy, had been sent down to the border and entrusted with overseeing the modernization and enlargement of the disinfection plant.³ Before arriving in El Paso in March of 1916, Pierce had been in charge of another quite formidable project, the public health service exhibit sponsored by the USPHS at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, California.⁴ While in San Francisco, Pierce had specialized in crafting dioramas, charts, and mechanical displays that sought to make the dynamics of disease and public hygiene “easily understood by the general public.”⁵ These simulacra—which detailed how fingers, flies, and water could transmit germs—showcased laboratory apparatuses and described proper techniques of eradication. Now, at El Paso’s Santa Fe Street Bridge, Pierce found himself responsible for transforming the artifactual and iconic into lived experience in an unusually radical fashion. On January 23, 1917, after over a year of preparation along the United States–Mexico border, Pierce announced that the moment had arrived for an “iron-clad quarantine” against every body entering the United States from Mexico.⁶ Perhaps four fatal cases of typhus fever reported in El Paso over a

3. United States Public Health Service (hereafter USPHS), Treasury Department, *Official List of Commissioned and Other Officers of the United States Public Health Service*, Miscellaneous Publication, no. 11 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, July 1915), 9.

4. In December 1915, Pierce was instructed by the USPHS to leave the exposition grounds. He first traveled to investigate an outbreak of typhus in Laredo, Texas, and by March was in El Paso. See Pierce to H. D. H. Connick, Director of Works, 15 Dec. 1915, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Panama-Pacific International Exposition Papers (hereafter UC-PPIE Papers), ms. C-A 190, box 86: Sanitation. Pierce’s work at the PPIE must be seen in light of his personal history in colonial ventures. He served in the Spanish–American War, was a quarantine officer in Panama from 1904 to 1912, and became superintendent of Panama’s Colon Hospital in 1913. For much of the 1920s Pierce dedicated himself to the eradication of venereal disease. In the 1930s he was stationed in Europe and during the 1940s he was medical director of the Planned Parenthood Federation. See *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 1: 1897–1942 (Chicago: The A. N. Marquis Company, 1950), 425. On the PPIE, the official compendium of information is Frank Morton Todd, *The Story of the Exposition: Being the Official History of the International Celebration Held at San Francisco in 1915 to Commemorate the Discovery of the Pacific Ocean and the Construction of the Panama Canal*, 5 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Son’s, 1921).

5. W. C. Rucker and C. C. Pierce, *United States Public Health Service Exhibit at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915. Public Health Reports Issued by the United States Public Health Service* (hereafter PHR), Supplement no. 27 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 31 Dec. 1915), 3.

6. Pierce to Quarantine Officers, Collectors of Customs, U.S. Immigration Officials and Others Concerned, “Mexican Border Quarantine,” 23 Jan. 1917, National Archives at

two-month period were reason enough for concern. But the implementation of the quarantine was more immediately linked to two particular losses—one medical and one military—that occurred in El Paso before Pierce began his campaign. The first was the death from typhus of Dr. W. C. Kluttz,⁷ the designated physician of this burgeoning frontier city so fixated on its image as “a great health center for the Southwest.”⁸ The second was General John J. Pershing’s concession that, after ten months of elusive pursuit, he had failed to capture the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa.⁹

Controlling lurking pathogens, however, was not so easy. The same morning that the quarantine was put into effect, Carmelita Torres, 47 years of age and most likely working as a domestic for an elite El Paso family, led a group of about 200 women from Ciudad Juárez, “incensed at the American quarantine regulations,” in protest against the new measures. The bridge and building were shut down almost all day. “From the time street cars began to run until the middle of the afternoon thousands of Mexicans thronged the Juarez side of the river and pushed out to the tollgate on the bridge. Women ringleaders of

College Park, Maryland (hereafter NACP), USPHS, Record Group 90 (hereafter RG 90), Central File, 1897–1923 (hereafter CF 1897–1923), file 1248; and *El Paso Herald Post*, 24 Jan. 1917, p. 1. Pierce’s quarantine announcement was also published in the *PHR*, 2 Feb. 1917, pp. 197–98. Seen as directly responsible for the influx of “diseased immigrants,” railway companies were repeatedly instructed to comply with the quarantine regulations and allow their passengers—many of whom were temporary Mexican laborers—to be inspected by either a USPHS or company physician. See, for example, “Measures to Prevent Typhus Fever. Instructions Issued to the Surgeons of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway Company,” *PHR*, 2 Mar. 1917, pp. 345–46.

7. Kluttz fell ill in late December and died on 2 Jan. 1917. In the local papers he was portrayed as a martyr of municipal sanitation campaigns and his death was directly linked to contact with a Mexican family living in an El Paso tenement. See the *El Paso Times*, 5 Jan. 1917; and the *El Paso Herald Post*, 1–2 and 4–5 Jan. 1917. Seven days after Kluttz’s death, Pierce sent a four-page letter to the United States surgeon general recommending that a quarantine be immediately put into effect; Pierce to Surgeon General, 9 Jan. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897–1923, file 1248. Official authorization, funding for extra personnel, and an exceedingly strict quarantine decree soon followed.

8. See the *El Paso Herald*, 27–28 Jan. 1917, Annual Review section, p. 6. The El Paso elite was obsessed with presenting the city as the Southwest’s “Magic Mountain,” an area blessed with a dry and curative climate ideal for tubercular and other patients and to be envied throughout the United States.

9. Pershing was ordered to withdraw from Mexico on 19 Jan. 1917; he and his troops began evacuating their encampments in Chihuahua the very weekend (Jan. 27–28) the quarantine went into effect. See Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing*, 2 vols. (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1977), 2:667.

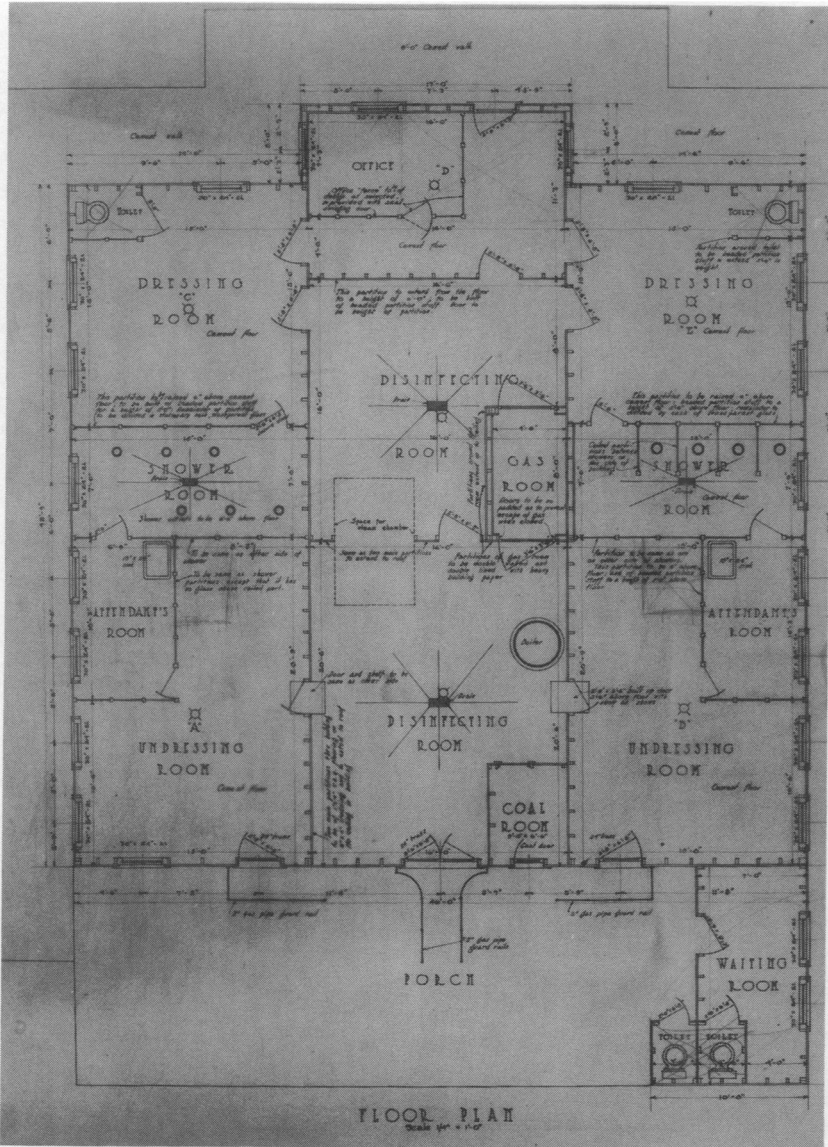


Fig. 1: Architectural blueprint for the El Paso Disinfection Plant, 1917. Photo included in letter from C. C. Pierce to the Surgeon General, 16 Feb. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 1248.

the mob hurled stones at American civilians, both on the bridge and on the streets of Juarez.”¹⁰ The following day the “bath riots” continued, as several men joined the protest. As one newspaper reported, “armed with empty bottles, rocks and sticks, about 200 Mexican women and a few men from Juarez, who held a demonstration at Juarez Sunday against the quarantine regulations being enforced at the border by the United States Public Health Service, again rushed the American troops, customs, immigration and quarantine officers at the Santa Fe international bridge.”¹¹

By the end of the week the “bath riots” had subsided and Mexicans, as well as all other immigrants seeking entry through El Paso, found themselves subjected to an elaborate medical inspection that differed in significant ways from procedures that were also in effect at Ellis and Angel Islands. In a special report that included photographs of four different points at the quarantine plant—the station for the sterilization of clothes, the entryway alongside the bridge where Mexicans waited to be deloused, the yard, and the women’s shower room—Pierce described the process by which medical inspectors scrutinized, differentiated, and then cleansed the multitudinous bodies that crossed the international bridge. Stating definitively that “all persons coming to El Paso from Mexico, considered as likely to be vermin infested, are sent through this plant for disinfection,” Pierce explained that upon entering the building the individuals were segregated by sex and forced to strip naked.¹² While their clothing was being chemically scoured, in a laundering that took about 30 minutes, each scalp was examined by a “male or female attendant, as the sex requires” for lice, the vectors of typhus fever.¹³ Those found to have

10. *El Paso Times*, 29 Jan. 1917, p. 1.

11. *El Paso Herald*, 29 Jan. 1917, evening edition, p. 1.

12. C. C. Pierce, “Combating Typhus Fever on the Mexican Border,” *PHR*, 32 (23 Mar. 1917), 426–29.

13. Considering the context of the bacteriological revolution—which began in earnest in the 1880s when scientists such as Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur discovered and verified that microorganisms were the causes of epidemic disease—the etiology of typhus was discerned rather late. In the early 1900s, bacteriologists believed that the typhus microbe was probably transmitted through some species of arthropod. In 1909 the French physician Charles Nicolle of the Pasteur Institute in Tunisia demonstrated that *Pediculus humanus corporis*, or the human body louse, was the principal vector of typhus. This was confirmed in 1916 by the Brazilian bacteriologist Henrique da Roche Lima. The bacteria, *Rickettsia prowazekii*, which eluded researchers because of its tiny size, was named after two victims of typhus fever, Howard Ricketts and Stanislaus Prowazek, who perished while trying to identify the bacteria (the former, in fact, died in Mexico in 1910). Carrying the deadly bacteria in its intestines, the louse attaches parasitically to a human host to consume blood

lice were specially treated. "The hair of the men or boys [was] clipped with no. 00 clippers, the hair dropping on a newspaper, which [was] then rolled up and burned. Women with head lice [had] a mixture of equal parts of kerosene and vinegar applied to the head and hair for half an hour with a towel covering the head."¹⁴ After delousing, all persons were then directed into sex-segregated showers where they were sprayed with a mixture of soap, kerosene, and water. An attendant directed and observed this entire process, after which immigrants were vaccinated for smallpox if deemed necessary. At the end of these ablutionary rites, individuals were given back their now sterilized clothing and in compensation for their ordeal were entitled to a signed certificate of the "United States Public Health Service, Mexican Border Quarantine," verifying that the bearer had been "deloused, bathed, vaccinated, [and all] clothing and baggage disinfected" (see fig. 2).¹⁵ The passage was not complete, however, for the immigrant still had to be assayed for possible exclusion due to physical or mental defects. This entailed a general medical examination, cursory psychological profiling, and an interrogation about self and citizenship.¹⁶

and soon deposits its feces. By scratching the rash and skin irritations occasioned by lice bites, victims eventually introduce the bacteria into their bloodstream. After an incubation period of 5 to 15 days, the disease suddenly manifests itself with high fever, severe headache, prostration, and chills, followed by a purplish and sienna rash that covers the victim's trunk and limbs. No known treatments existed in the early 1900s, but with the introduction of broad-spectrum antibiotics in the 1940s typhus had become curable if diagnosed early. See "Epidemic Typhus," in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993); Kim Pelis, "Prophet for Profit in French North Africa: Charles Nicolle and the Pasteur Institute of Tunis, 1903–1936," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 71 (1997); Howard Markel, *Quarantine!: East European Jewish Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), 46–55; Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History: Being a Study in Biography, Which . . . Deals with the Life History of Typhus Fever* (1935; reprint, New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1996); and Victoria A. Harden, "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Research and the Development of the Insect Vector Theory, 1900–1930," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985).

14. Pierce, "Combating Typhus Fever," 427.

15. *Ibid.*, 428.

16. After passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, new booklets replete with itemized instructions and examples of "undesirability" were published; see Treasury Department, USPHS, *Regulations Governing the Medical Inspection of Aliens*, Miscellaneous Publication, no. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917); and Treasury Department, USPHS, *Manual of the Mental Examination of Aliens*, Miscellaneous Publication, no. 18 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918). Disease classification was standardized in 1917 and reprinted in a 1920 publication: Treasury Department, USPHS, *The Control of Communicable Diseases: Report of the American Public Health Association*

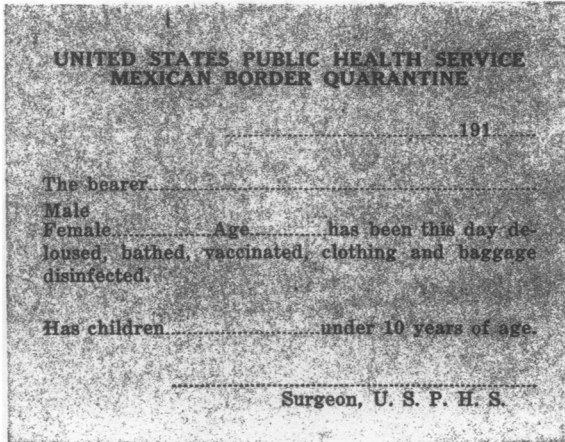


Fig. 2: Quarantine card included as a loose document in NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 1248.

In June 1917, after the quarantine system had been in effect for approximately four months, Pierce could report that no new cases of typhus fever had occurred along the Mexican border.¹⁷ Out of 31 cases of typhus recorded throughout the United States during this same period, there were only three fatalities, all in El Paso.¹⁸ Though constituting the totality of United States typhus deaths, this figure pales in light of the relevant statistics at the border: 871,639 bodies inspected; 69,674 disinfected; 30,970 vaccinated for smallpox; 420 excluded on account of illness; 7 denied entry for refusing disinfection; and 8 retained for observation.¹⁹ According to Pierce's numbers, Texas border

Committee on Standard Regulations Appointed in October, 1916, Miscellaneous Publication, no. 24 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920).

17. *PHR*, 1 June 1917, p. 865; and *PHR*, 29 June 1917, p. 1057. The other Texas cities where the quarantine was in force were Laredo, Eagle Pass, Rio Grande City, and Brownsville. Of these only Eagle Pass and Laredo had operable disinfection stations; see Pierce to Surgeon General, 9 Jan. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 1248. The quarantine was also implemented in the Arizona cities of Naco, Nogales, Douglas, and Tucson; see *PHR*, 2 Feb. 1917, p. 211.

18. These figures are calculated from numbers reported by Pierce in the *PHR* from the week ending 13 Jan. 1917 to the week ending 9 June 1917. These weekly reports are plagued by numerous inconsistencies, apparently because Pierce double-counted certain cases. These perhaps liberal figures show that of 31 total cases of typhus throughout the United States during this period, 25 occurred in El Paso (including the 3 fatalities), 3 in Laredo, 1 in Eagle Pass, 1 in Austin, and 1 in New York.

19. Again, these figures are calculated from information given in the *PHR* from the week ending 13 Jan. 1917 to the week ending 9 June 1917. When in doubt the higher number was always used.

officials inspected 39,620 bodies per week, or 5,660 per day. Considering that most entrants came through El Paso, we can divide the latter figure in half to arrive at what is surely a conservative estimate: 2,830 bodies inspected each day at the Santa Fe Street Bridge. With a 12-hour workday that stretched from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., this translates to 236 per hour, or about 80 per hour for each of the three physicians on duty.²⁰ These figures far surpass those calculated for Ellis Island during the same time period. In 1917, for example, 129,000 immigrants were scrutinized at Ellis Island, despite the disruption caused by World War I.²¹ According to these numbers, the team of approximately 20 physicians examined slightly over 350 bodies each day. Given the limited infrastructural capacity of the Santa Fe Street Station in comparison to Ellis Island, the figure of 236 bodies per hour reveals the fervor which characterized the quarantine of Mexicans. Even more significant, however, is the fact

20. USPHS documents and newspaper articles indicate that the Santa Fe Street Station had at least two and usually three physicians on active duty during the first four months of the quarantine. These included Pierce, John W. Tappan (a USPHS assistant surgeon and El Paso's city physician for several months after Klutz's death), and at different times either Dr. T. C. Galloway (also of the USPHS), or the local doctor (and later city physician) Hugh White. I suspect that additional physicians probably took part in the quarantine and vaccination processes, given that the city's medical community worked so closely with the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the United States Army. Excluding physicians and associated immigration inspectors, by January 1917 the El Paso quarantine station had about a dozen full-time employees running the plant. See "Personnel of the Texas-Mexican Border Quarantine," June 1916, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 126; as well as the correspondence between June 1916 and January 1917 from Pierce and Tappan to the surgeon general requesting more workers for the station, in NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, files 1248 and 126. Finally, although I have estimated 2,830 immigrants inspected at the Santa Fe Street Station each day, this is probably a low figure, given that many contemporary estimates stressed that 75 percent or more of all entries came through El Paso. In order not to overstate my case I am using conservative numbers.

21. This figure comes from Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York-New Jersey*, 3 vols. (Denver: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984), 3:734. The actual number of immigrants inspected might have been under 100,000 given that generally only steerage passengers were processed at Ellis Island. This was the case, for example, in 1916 when of 176,461 immigrants who entered the United States through Ellis Island, only 101,406 (the steerage class) actually proceeded to the island. The 75,055 cabin passengers were inspected by USPHS and steamship physicians on board. See *Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1916* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 7. This data was generously provided to me by John Parascandola, who also pointed out the difficulties of obtaining exact statistics for these years.

that stripping and showers were compulsory and integrated directly into the general immigration examinations. At Ellis Island immigrants underwent a complete medical inspection, and when suspected of disease were required to strip.²² Delousing was seldom part of detention or the extended observation of immigrants. Disinfection and vaccination were almost wholly carried out by the steamship companies and officials who were charged with examining passengers before disembarkation. These procedures had developed throughout the nineteenth century and became standardized into law with the passage of the 1893 National Quarantine Act and subsequent immigration acts.²³ On the Mexican border, where immigrants entered by foot not ship, medicalization was incorporated directly into the process of entry.²⁴ Moreover, in El Paso, and along the border in general, forced nudity and totalizing disinfections continued into the late 1920s, long after the typhus panic had subsided.²⁵

Making Empire Present: Buildings, Boundaries, Blood, and Biopower

Historians of the United States West and of Mexico have documented and described the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border from a abstract and imprecise line established by treaty in the late nineteenth century to a clearly defined and constantly monitored border by the 1920s.²⁶ For the most part,

22. Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigration Menace"* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 55–56. See chap. 3 for a vivid description of mental and medical examinations on Ellis Land.

23. For an excellent analysis of the development of the 1893 law and its relationship to epidemics and immigration, see Markel, *Quarantine!*, chaps. 6–8.

24. Kraut, *Silent Travelers*, chap. 3. Such disinfection procedures were employed on Angel Island and ports throughout Asia before immigrants embarked to the United States. See Nayan Shah, "San Francisco's 'Chinatown': Race and the Cultural Politics of Public Health, 1854–1952" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1995), esp. part 2.

25. By the mid-1920s, the quarantine had not been rescinded, although the hour of bridge closing had been extended to 12:30 A.M. Requests of Mexican and even several United States officials to terminate the quarantine or open up the bridge consistently fell on deaf ears.

26. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987), chap. 7; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), chap. 2; and Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), 7–21.

the construction of the border has been narrated as a logical course of events that simply, and predictably, followed changes in migration patterns and laws. The sequence began with the inspectors dispatched in the late nineteenth century to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and continued with an increasing focus on Italian, Jewish, and Slavic immigrants at the turn of the century. Policy then shifted to the transformation of the Mexican into an “alien other” in the 1920s, when immigration restrictions reached their zenith with the passage of the 1924 National Origins Act and the establishment of the Border Patrol. A widespread assumption is that techniques of assessment and scrutiny were brought from Ellis Island to the southern border’s ports of entry and that medical and mental exams arose *ex post facto* as ideological after-shadows of more and more restrictive legislation. In such accounts medicalization, when and if mentioned, has been interpreted as just one facet of increasingly stringent immigration restrictions and not as a significant and complex phenomenon in its own right.²⁷

Recasting this historical concatenation through a different set of archival registers and against a script that consistently erases and defuses the United States empire tells another more ramified, repercussive, and temporally layered story. Amy Kaplan, in her pioneering essay “Left Alone with America,” points to three “absences” that have often structured studies of the United States across the disciplinary spectrum: “the absence of culture from the history of U.S. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism.”²⁸ In this essay, I treat medicalization as a far-reaching cultural and scientific formation pivotal to United States imperialism and nation-building in the early twentieth century. Inspired and influenced by Ann Stoler’s quest to write the genealogies of race, sexuality, and biopower into colonialism, this essay represents a preliminary step toward locating empire, the body, and biologized techniques of social differentiation on the horizon of

27. Mark Reisler, for example, traces the politics of borderlands immigration within the framework of national legislation. While his insightful analysis of racialized discourse in the 1920s does examine the role of eugenics, it does not explore public health practices in border regions. See Mark Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900–1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976). In his history of immigration, exclusion, and changing notions of disease, Alan Kraut does not analyze immigration along the Mexican border; see Kraut, *Silent Travelers*.

28. Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, eds. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 11.

United States modernity.²⁹ The most flexible and dynamic way to begin to tell such a story is through a spatial narrative that tracks the criss-crossing movement of scientific, nosological, and corporeal knowledge and practices.

The points of connection that frame this theoretical and historical exploration are buildings, boundaries, and blood. Buildings are sites of containment, processing, and enumeration. Additionally, in the case of Mexican migration to the United States, buildings were sites of exhibition, disinfection, and violence. They also housed (and house) the letters, the reports, the maps, the images, and the statistics that bring together seemingly disparate individuals and organizations whose shared symbols and concerns became Mexico, Mexicans, and the border. Through highlighting the use, occupation, and eradication of certain buildings—the disinfection plant, the El Paso county jail, and the *jacales*, or shacks, in which many Mexicans who had moved to El Paso resided—I hope to provide a different framework for apprehending the emergence of the U.S.-Mexico border and the early-twentieth-century shaping of the body politic.

Boundaries follow from buildings in the sense of containment, but they also operate as thresholds that simultaneously embrace and repulse, hence their potency and volatility. The concept of “interior frontiers” that Stoler uses to describe and analyze Dutch and French anxieties over *mestissage* and loss of purity in the colonial Indies and Indochina takes on special salience when transposed to the U.S.-Mexico border.³⁰ While it could be argued that the Rio Grande inscribes a “natural” line of division from the Gulf of Mexico to western Texas, half of the border consists of flat and arid terrain that militates against any clear-cut division along climatic or topographical lines. In the early decades of this century, the “boundary line” became (as it remains) pivotal to

29. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995). I have also been guided by David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993); and Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989). For an excellent analysis of conflict and construction in another American borderlands regions, see Lauren Derby, “Haitians, Magic, and Money: *Raza* and Society in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands, 1900 to 1937,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36 (1994).

30. For her most recent formulation and analytical deployment of this concept, see Ann Laura Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

demarcating the modern United States body politic. Fears over miscegenation and the centrifugal forces of barbarous Mexico threatened the United States with irrevocable decline and haunted the United States in the teens and twenties. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the USPHS, and the professionalized military—components of an increasingly bureaucratic, rationalized, and militarized state—were concerned first and foremost with questions of integrity; and they worked vigorously to maintain boundaries. And just as practices of exclusion shaped the relations of the United States with Mexico, they also helped to define boundaries in the city of El Paso. In this case the dialogical interplay between empire and neocolony played out across the Rio Grande. Boundaries, at this edge of the empire-nation, moved reversibly from the epidermis or body itself, to the landscape of rivers and deserts, and onto bodies en masse, or “races,” as classified by censuses and other indexical strategies.

Lastly, I will consider blood, which in the early twentieth century had multiple meanings. Most critically, it was conceived of as the carrier of germs, heredity, and character. While the two principal scientific groups I examine in this essay—public health officials and eugenicists—often disagreed over the question of social welfare (the former supported state intervention and environmentalism while the latter frequently embraced Social Darwinist doctrines of the “survival of the fittest” and rejected sanitarianism), blood brought them together. To speak of blood was to share a discourse about life that was both repressive and productive, both exclusionary and expansive. The addition of the category of *Mexican*—which conflated “race” with nation—to the 1930 United States census must be viewed in this dual light, formed by and through eugenic, medicalized, and statistical knowledges about human bodies and identities.

Framing my exploration of one conjuncture and facet of United States modernity through the imbricated triad of buildings, boundaries, and blood enables me to begin to unravel what a spatial narrative of biopower might look like. By setting down an underlying theoretical matrix centered on biopower, a perversely modern style and strategy of “disciplining the body and of regulating populations,” I can move from the realm of the singular body and subjectivity to that of the body politic and nation imagined.³¹ In his illuminating analysis of Foucault’s concepts of governmentality, practices of the self, and normalization, Mitchell Dean explains the historical symbiosis between biopower and episte-

31. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 146.

mology, writing that the exercise of biopower is not possible without the development of specific forms of rationality and discourse taking the individual, body and soul, and the population, and its component parts, as objects of knowledge.³² The specific forms of rationality and discourse that I address in this essay are the cultural and social-scientific formations of eugenics and public health, both of which were emphatically central to racialization, definitions of citizenship, and the legitimation of violence during the 1910s and 1920s.

“The Holocaust”

In early March of 1916, approximately 20 prisoners were incarcerated in the El Paso county jail. They were suspected of supporting Pancho Villa—as well as being infested with lice. On the evening of March 6, while being bathed in a tub of kerosene one inmate struck a match. The building exploded and almost all the prisoners perished in the blaze.³³ Three days later Pancho Villa raided the garrison town of Columbus, New Mexico. His troops “torched buildings in the town, shooting civilians who emerged fleeing.”³⁴ After a six-hour battle, the *villistas* were repulsed by units of the 13th United States Cavalry. Seventeen Americans were killed, and estimates put Mexican casualties as high as one hundred. Such a transgression was met with swift retribution. On March 15, Pershing set out with 4,800 men, later increased to 10,000, in an ultimately futile chase after Villa.

Uncovering the events that transpired at the El Paso county jail before the Columbus raid reconfigures the narrative that has often been told about the Mexican Revolution, border politics during the 1910s, and Villa himself. In most historiographical accounts, the incursion is interpreted as either a diplomatic ploy to undermine Venustiano Carranza (Mexico’s provisional president) by galvanizing anti-Yankee sentiment and Mexican nationalism, or as a *villista* act of revenge for a weapons deal gone awry.³⁵ These considerations were surely

32. Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories: Foucault’s Methods and Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 172.

33. For descriptions of this incident as well as reports of Villa’s raid, see the headline stories in the *El Paso Times* and *El Paso Herald* from 6 to 10 Mar. 1916.

34. Linda B. Hall and Don M. Coerver, *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910–1920* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1988), 60. The starting point for any discussion of the Columbus raid is Friedrich Katz, “Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus, New Mexico,” *American Historical Review* 83 (1978).

35. See Katz, “Pancho Villa”; and Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, vol. 2: *Counter-revolution and Reconstruction* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1986), 419–21.

factors, but in a context in which militarization and medicalization were so closely related, underscoring and producing practices and languages of invasion and contamination, it is possible to read Villa's act through the lens of biopower. Reconstructing the symbiosis between insurgency and the surveillance of disease within the urban geography of El Paso tells a story with broader ramifications for understanding racialization in the United States during the 1910s and 1920s. It also demonstrates the continuity between United States colonial projects and the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border. If in the Philippines the strategies of "American military surgeons" followed and eventually replaced those of "the officers and combat troops of the initial period of conquest," in the Southwest militarization and medicalization were coterminous and symbiotically intertwined.³⁶

Throughout the first half of the 1910s, numerous raids and showdowns that pitted a multifarious amalgam of insurgents, gun-runners, and exiles against United States military forces heightened the bellicose atmosphere that had come to characterize the postcolonial borderlands after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848.³⁷ When the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1911, one of the first steps President Taft took was to expand the Texas Rangers—an Anglo vigilante group organized in 1873 that was known for taking the law into its own hands—and reinforce the army troops stationed in Texas, creating the "Maneuver Division," headquartered in San Antonio.³⁸ By the mid-1910s, 21 Americans—civilians and military—had been killed in one or another type of altercation, and insurgency in Mexico showed no signs of abatement. To monitor tensions in the borderlands, Pershing, the "frontier" cavalryman who had fought the last Apaches in the 1880s and had led troops against the Sioux during the Ghost Dances of 1890, returned west to take charge of the largest military force assembled since the Civil War.³⁹ At the end

36. Reynaldo Ileto, "Cholera and the Origins of the American Sanitary Order," in *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*, ed. Vicente L. Rafael (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1995), 59. For an eloquent treatment of the Philippines as a laboratory for tropical medicine and a discussion of how bacteriology and germ theory superseded filth theories of disease, see in the same volume, Warwick Anderson, "'Where Every Prospect Pleases and Only Man is Vile': Laboratory Medicine as Colonial Discourse."

37. For an excellent article that explores the multilayered history of rebellion and revolt in the borderlands during the late nineteenth century, see Elliott Young, "Remembering Catarino Garza's 1891 Revolution: An Aborted Border Insurrection," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 12 (1996).

38. See Hall and Coerver, *Revolution on the Border*, chap. 4.

39. On Pershing's pre-World War I career, see Vandiver, *Black Jack*, vol. 1. For a general introduction to United States military campaigns against Native Americans, see

of the century, Pershing had helped to establish the Bureau of Insular Affairs, which oversaw United States projects in the Caribbean and the Pacific. He then served in the 10th United States Cavalry in Cuba in 1898, and governed the Moro province of southern Mindanao in the Philippines until the early 1910s. His arrival in Texas in 1914 was, therefore, a continuation of his colonial career.

From the onset of the Mexican Revolution, the El Paso–Juárez region was a focal point of armed activity and popular mobilization. In May 1911, a three-day battle for Ciudad Juárez—which contending factions had more than once proclaimed to be the “provisional capital” of Mexico—established the political significance of the twin cities. As soon as Pershing appeared at the border, his troops began to patrol the streets of El Paso. This vigilance only intensified over time, especially after 1915, when rumors of potential uprisings by dislocated Mexicans and disgruntled revolutionary factions began to spread. But before Pershing helped enforce martial law in El Paso, during what has often been seen as the city’s first “race riot,” and before his troops set off on the punitive expedition against Villa, they concerned themselves with another set of evasive enemies: bacteria and microbes.

During the latter half of 1914 and through all of 1915 the United States military assisted the local government and the El Paso Associated Charities—an organization vested with a spirit of progressivism and reform—in “improving” the city’s Second Ward, a Mexican district referred to as Chihuahuita. In 1914 Pershing offered the city the sanitary expertise of the army, whose familiarity with “such conditions as those met in Panama, Cuba and the Philippines” had prepared them for Chihuahuita, referred to in the *El Paso Times* as the city’s “plague spot.”⁴⁰ In May 1915, when these campaigns reached new heights, “General Pershing placed his entire medical corps, officers, and enlisted men at the disposal of the city.”⁴¹ Supported by the mayor—who

Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846–1890* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1984). In *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1980; reprint, Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1997), Richard Drinnon explores the connections between the conquest of the West, the displacement and destruction of Indian communities, and United States colonialism.

40. *El Paso Herald*, 25 May 1914, p. 4. Also cited in Shawn Lay, *War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan: A Study of Intolerance in a Border City* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1985), 54.

41. Leon C. Metz, *El Paso Chronicles: A Record of Historical Events in El Paso, Texas* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1993), 177.

offered prizes for the boy who “[cleaned] up the premises best”—Klutz and an officer from the 20th Infantry inspected the city “block by block.”⁴² Emboldened by a language focused on contagion and the eradication of disease, Pershing’s men hosed streets, burned carrion and refuse, and tore down dwellings.

Moreover, army, municipal, and USPHS physicians often met under the auspices of the El Paso County Medical Society and worked together throughout the decade of 1910 to develop strategies to deal with what one doctor termed “the problem of the Southside, the problem of Chihuahuita.”⁴³ During a Medical Society discussion in which the city’s diseases, criminality, and sloth were all traced to the Mexican quarter, one physician urged that Chihuahuita be turned over to the army, which had cleaned up and eradicated disease in Cuba, San Francisco, and the Philippines. He continued by noting that “the same thing can be done down here if only pressure enough is brought to bear on the administration.”⁴⁴ Much as British officials penetrated poor East End neighborhoods in late-nineteenth-century London, seeking to uplift and cleanse, so too did the United States military and medical police enter into El Paso’s Mexican barrios. With soap, water, and demolition as their weapons, they aimed to enlighten and sterilize the *jacales*, often portrayed as dark, dank, and germ-ridden cesspools.⁴⁵

Therefore, Pershing and his troops were well acquainted with the segregated streets of El Paso when in January 1916 Pancho Villa carried out the vilified act of anti-Americanism blamed for inciting El Paso’s first bona fide “race riot.”⁴⁶ Villa’s troops detained and executed 17 United States mining engineers en route to Chihuahua City. All the victims were employees of the American Smelting and Refining Company, one of the first large-scale capital enterprises to come to El Paso in the 1880s and a mainstay of the local econ-

42. *El Paso Herald*, 20 May 1915, p. 9.

43. Dr. Howard Thompson, “What We May Reasonably Expect,” *The Bulletin of the El Paso County Medical Society* 7, no. 8 (Nov. 1915), 9.

44. Comments of Dr. Ramey, in Thompson, “What We May Reasonably Expect,” 13–14.

45. For an analysis of the medicalization of London’s slums, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), chap. 3; and Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992).

46. See Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880–1920* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), chap. 9; and Lay, *War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan*, chap. 2.

omy. Reports of the heinousness of the crime, in which the victims, nine of whom were from El Paso, “had been stripped and physically abused prior to their murder,” quickly reached the city.⁴⁷ A night of riots erupted after the disfigured corpses arrived at the train station.⁴⁸ Brawls broke out between Mexican and Anglo men in several saloons and then spilled out onto the streets, where Mexicans were repeatedly assailed. “Following the fisticuffs, between 25 and 50 Americans attacked every Mexican they could find on the streets. They moved in the direction of Chihuahuita and called out to the others to join them.”⁴⁹

The racialized violence that followed the “Santa Isabel Massacre” figures as a common and graphic referent in the oral history narratives of border residents interviewed in the 1960s and 1970s by the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas, El Paso. For example, Hortencia Villegas, who in 1913 moved to El Paso from Chihuahua, remembered the evening the cadavers were sent back from Santa Isabel: “We went to the Alcazar Theater on El Paso Street. And lo and behold when we left, Ay! a rumpus with the Americans [Anglos] who were lashing out at all the Mexicans. I was just a girl but I remember the Americans beating up everyone, old and young alike. . . . They [the Americans] came into the Second Ward with sticks and who knows what else.”⁵⁰ When the rioting continued into the morning, the city’s mayor declared martial law and called upon Pershing’s troops as well as the National Guard to shore up the local police.⁵¹ Although the riots only lasted one day, they drew national attention to the border, gaining headlines in the *New York Times*, and no doubt roused the curiosity of the men and women who trekked from distant cities to take stock of the situation in El Paso.⁵²

One of the first to show up was Pierce. The month preceding the “Santa Isabel Massacre,” as it came to be known in the United States, he had been ordered to the border to investigate the region’s first reported case of typhus.⁵³ Eager to find sites at which to disinfect incoming immigrants, within a couple

47. Lay, *War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan*, 17.

48. Garcia, *Desert Immigrants*, 188.

49. *Ibid.*, 189.

50. Transcription of tape 235, interview with Hortencia Villegas by Oscar J. Martínez, 17 Feb. 1976, University of Texas at El Paso, Institute of Oral History (hereafter UTEP-IOH), pp. 13–14. All translations are mine.

51. Garcia, *Desert Immigrants*, 189.

52. Lay, *War, Revolution, and the Ku Klux Klan*, 25.

53. See fn. 4 and Pierce to Surgeon General, 20 Dec. 1915, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897–1923, file 2126.

of months of arrival Pierce had located an abandoned French-built quarantine station in Juárez, which he restored to full operation with the help of several Mexican doctors.⁵⁴ Collaborating with El Paso's other public health service doctor, John W. Tappan, as well as with El Paso's city physician, Kluttz, Pierce soon proclaimed that with all incoming baggage being "fumigated by dry heat" and all waste being "destroyed by fire," typhus was being held at bay.⁵⁵ Several months later, due largely to the urging of these men as well as El Paso's mayor, Tom Lea, President Woodrow Wilson authorized a modified quarantine along the Mexican border.⁵⁶

In the midst of this escalation, when United States intervention seemed imminent, another important figure, David Starr Jordan, ventured to El Paso to take stock of the situation along the border. However, Jordan opposed a United States military invasion of Mexico. Trained as a botanist and ichthyologist, and at one time president and then chancellor of Stanford University, in the early decades of this century Jordan took a special interest in Mexico, Mexicans, and the border. Like that of Pershing, Jordan's career had followed the contours of United States colonialism, but from a diametrically opposed angle. While Pershing had fought for territory and open markets, Jordan was a stalwart antiexpansionist and anti-imperialist; for him expanding the limits of the

54. Tappan to Pierce, 1 Mar. 1916, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 1248. The previous month Pierce had also located old quarantine stations in Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, and Matamoros, which he also put back into operation; see "Memorandum Relative to the Quarantine Transactions along the Texas-Mexican Border," 3 Aug. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 2126.

55. *Survey Graphic*, 4 Mar. 1916, p. 652.

56. "Quarantine Restrictions upon Persons and Property for the Purpose of Preventing the Introduction of Typhus Fever into the United States," 30 June 1916, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 2126. President Wilson, using powers granted him by a section of the 1893 National Quarantine Act, declared a quarantine after a detailed letter from his secretary, William G. McAdoo, encouraged him to do so. Given that the USPHS was using Mexico's own plant in Juárez for disinfection, it was logistically impossible to enact a full-fledged quarantine. Furthermore, this action was clearly a conciliatory, though fairly ineffectual, gesture to appease both those camps clamoring for a quarantine and the more tempered reports of the USPHS surgeon, B. J. Lloyd, who had been sent to the border to survey the potential for epidemic outbreaks. Lloyd, nonetheless, viewed the zealotry of Pierce and the local medical community as unwarranted. In a letter to the surgeon general he wrote that "typhus fever is not now and probably never will be, a serious menace to our civilian population in the United States." See Lloyd to Surgeon General, 27 June 1916, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897-1923, file 1248. Lloyd, wary of the political ramifications of using the disinfection plant in Juárez, was instrumental in securing funding and support for the erection of the Santa Fe Street Bridge plant.

United States meant the defilement and mongrelization of the body politic.⁵⁷ One of the least studied but most intriguing figures in the United States eugenics movement, Jordan's concern with "the blood of the nation" marked his career from the beginning—as illustrated by his 1910 tract on the affinities between national progress, purity, and isolationism.⁵⁸ In 1895 he and Charles Davenport, founder of the Eugenics Records Office and the American Eugenics Society, and probably the most well-known eugenicist in the United States, initiated correspondence that would continue for over 30 years. In these early letters they adumbrated many themes—the importance of the census, the implications of Darwinism, and the definitions of "feeble-mindedness"—that would characterize the formalized eugenics movement in the United States.⁵⁹

Having gone to the border ready to denounce any possible United States military occupation of Mexico, Jordan had probably visited or dined with Pierce, whom he had met the previous year at the Second National Conference on Race Betterment held at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.⁶⁰ One of the many gatherings convened during "the greatest period of medical conventions in the world's history," the four-day conference was sponsored by the Race Betterment Foundation and included lectures, plays, tours, and fine dining.⁶¹ While Pierce was running the UPSHS exhibit, carrying out meticulous inspections of

57. Jordan founded the Anti-Imperialist League and for almost 20 years was its vice president. He was also honorary vice president of the National Association of Anti-Imperialist Clubs; a member of the Philippine Independence Committee; and, from 1905 to 1907, vice president of the Filipino Progress Association.

58. See David Starr Jordan, *The Blood of the Nation: A Study of the Decay of Races through the Survival of the Unfit* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 7. Although Jordan acknowledged that blood alone did not determine heredity, he nonetheless found the metaphor suitable and powerful.

59. See Davenport's correspondence with David Starr Jordan, American Philosophical Society (hereafter APS), Philadelphia, Charles B. Davenport Papers, Manuscript Collection, B:D27.

60. In response to the mounting demands of United States oil companies and businessmen for intervention in Mexico, Jordan established the Mexican American League, a small organization made up of progressive reformers, including Protestants and scientists from Mexico and the United States, to counter such expansionism. In preparation for a meeting of the affiliated Mexican American Peace Conference in Washington D.C., Jordan embarked on an investigative mission of El Paso and the border. While in El Paso he stayed at the Hotel Paso del Norte, met with the city's elite, and spoke at the University Club; see *Survey Graphic*, 15 July 1916, pp. 415–16; and the *El Paso Times*, 27 June 1916, p. 1.

61. Founded in 1906 by the health guru, cereal king, and devout vegetarian John H. Kellogg, during the early part of this century the Race Betterment Foundation promoted an eclectic mix of "better breeding," enema cures, and sexual abstinence. The Foundation sponsored three such conferences (in 1914, 1915, and 1928).

the fairgrounds, expounding on the pestilence of rats, and attempting to enforce strict legislation against spitting in public, Jordan was organizing the conference.⁶² Both men were designated guests of honor and presented talks.⁶³ While Pierce's opening-day lecture discussed typhoid fever, Jordan's talk (given the following day during a joint session with the American Social Hygiene Association) focused on the dysgenic effects of war. Like other medical meetings, the Race Betterment Conference treated "Panamerica" as a central concern, and various lectures explicitly addressed Latin America and tropical medicine.⁶⁴ Both Pierce and Jordan were indubitably in attendance when Edgar L. Hewett, who had traveled from the border city of San Diego, gave a talk entitled "A Conspicuous Failure in Race Betterment,"⁶⁵ in which he "confided his belief that Mexicans imperil in some measure the health of the race in its onward march."⁶⁶ Discourses and practices that resulted from the Panama-Pacific International Exposition—a conspicuous celebration of the United States empire—served as a backdrop to the endeavors of these two men along the U.S.-Mexico border the following year. For his part, Pierce would reinforce patterns of medicalization and social containment that dated to the late nineteenth century; and he would inscribe the boundary line in more far-reaching and violent ways than before. Jordan, on the other hand, would use his knowledge to defend the perimeters of the body politic from the standpoint of anti-imperialism. During the 1920s he joined with other eugenicists and restrictionists in calling for a fixed immigration quota for Mexicans, while at the same time championing nonintervention and supporting Mexican nationalism.

62. For an insightful reading of Jordan's participation in the fair, see Bill Brown, "Science Fiction, the World's Fair, and the Prosthetics of Empire, 1910–1915," in Kaplan and Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*.

63. "Program of the Second International Conference on Race Betterment," 4–8 Aug. 1915, UC-PPIE Papers, ms. C-A 190, box 12, folder: Programs.

64. Todd, *Story of the Exposition*, 5:16. The medical month was replete with meetings of groups such as the Pan-American Medical Congress, the American Social Hygiene Association, the Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the Medical Association of the Isthmian Canal Zone, and the Society of the Spanish-American War Nurses. Advances in bacteriology, sanitation, and tropical disease control that had been learned in United States colonies were displayed and discussed. The specter of increased immigration and putative threats of contagia brought on by the annexation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines characterized almost all of these meetings.

65. *Official Proceedings of the Second National Conference on Race Betterment, August 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, 1915* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Race Betterment Foundation, 1915).

66. Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 224.

Before his influence in eugenic discourses in the 1920s, however, Jordan had penned one of the only existing accounts of the conflagration that occurred in the El Paso county jail several days before Villa's incursion into Columbus. Sent as an editorial to the *Survey Graphic*, the quintessential journal of the progressive era, and entitled "The Holocaust," Jordan's vignette reveals the extent to which an analogical chain linking transgression, disease, and violence had come to frame representations of Mexico and Mexicans, as well as the border itself. Jordan related to his audience:

On March 6th a number of these Mexicans (some twenty, I am told), were in jail in El Paso. Part of them probably bearing lice, all were given a bath in gasoline. Some one [sic] lit a match and the affair, known as 'The Holocaust' occurred. All were burned alive, with the building, and, it is said, two or three American hoboes. This the Mayor called an 'unavoidable accident,' but the Mexicans in Juárez believed that it was done deliberately. The word came to Villa, and three days later he raided Columbus. Villa declared beforehand that he was going to "make torches" of every American he found.⁶⁷

A month before Jordan arrived in the frontier city, the *Bulletin of the El Paso Medical Society* had printed a paragraph chronicling what it also termed "the Jail Holocaust."⁶⁸ Immediately below this story was another article entitled "Typhus Fever," which linked disease and transgression to Villa in a dramatic fashion. Reporting that an "unknown Mexican" had escaped from isolation at the county hospital, where he was being treated for typhus, the article then stated that this fugitive patient spent much of his time in the ward "calling out 'Viva Villa.'"⁶⁹ Border residents also consistently emphasized "the Holocaust" and, significantly, the act of delousing, in discussing the Columbus raid. Mario Acevedo, a long-time El Paso resident, recalled the explosion and its repercussions in the following terms: "I think they were delousing some prisoners, and that they were using gasoline to delouse them. And one or two people, from a distance . . . And I should emphasize this: not in an intentional but rather inadvertent manner, someone from a distance struck a match to light a cigarette. You know that the gas in gasoline is extremely dangerous.

67. Cited in Robert Bruce Brinsmade and M. C. Rolland, *Mexican Problems* (New York: Latin American News Association, 1916), 28.

68. "The Jail Holocaust" and "Typhus Fever," *The Bulletin of the El Paso County Medical Society* 8, no. 5 (May 1916), 263–65.

69. "Typhus Fever," 264–65.

And it caught aflame. And rumors spread that one or two of the prisoners had been burnt on purpose. And according to the rumors, to the back-alley talk, Villa said: ‘Now I’ll show them how to set people aflame!’”⁷⁰ S. L. A. Marshall, who later fought in World War I and became a brigadier general, had moved to El Paso with his family when his father took over the International Brick Company. Marshall was only 16 at the time, but over 60 years later he was still able to vividly recount the reprisal for Villa’s raid: “I went downtown to San Antonio Street and there were mobs of Anglos (as they are now called) going up and down San Antonio Street armed with clubs and pistols and so on. Every time that they would run into a Mexican they would beat him up and throw him into an alley. It was one of the most horrible scenes I’ve ever seen.”⁷¹ In his narrative Marshall linked this incident to the city’s first “race riot” that had occurred two months previously, after the “Santa Isabel Massacre.” Marshall bracketed all these events within ten minutes of his oral history interview, punctuating his story with the observation that “when the raid hit, we in El Paso thought that this was a reprisal for what had happened in the jail.”⁷²

Local history weaves together a succession of events—the “Santa Isabel Massacre,” the subsequent race riots, Villa’s raid on Columbus, and Pershing’s punitive expedition—to tell a story of nationalist hostilities and military intrigue. In this narrative Pershing’s colonial past is usually elided, while the ultimately consequential expeditions of Pierce and Jordan—each developing their own distinct knowledge about bodies and blood—never appear.⁷³ While Pershing ran roughshod through northern Mexico, misdirected and beguiled by villagers and *villista* sympathizers alike, Pierce and other local physicians began refurbishing the disinfection plant to combat typhus fever along the

70. Transcription of tape 153B, interview with Mario Acevedo by Oscar J. Martínez, 1 May 1975, UTEP-IOH, pp. 21–22. Portions of this interview are also quoted in Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, chap. 2.

71. Tape 181, Interview with Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall by Richard Estrada, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 19 July 1975, UTEP-IOH.

72. *Ibid.*

73. The only article that makes such a link was called to my attention by Friedrich Katz. In it the connection between utterance and action are obvious: “On the night of March 8, Villa made what his followers describe as the most impassioned speech of his melodramatic life. He began by reciting a long list of grievances of Mexicans against the United States. He described the accidental burning to death of a dozen Mexicans in an El Paso delousing station as murder, and implored revenge.” See Tom Mahoney, “The Columbus Raid,” *Southwest Review* 17 (1932): 164.

border. And in 1917, when Pershing had long since left to lead his men off to the European front, Pierce remained in the building at the Santa Fe Street Bridge, counting bodies.

Boundaries

As El Paso took shape at the turn of century, surging to become the transportation, labor, and mining center of the Southwest, it also became a pivotal point on the perimeter of the continental United States: the immigration, customs, and public health headquarters of the region.⁷⁴ Although the line between Mexico and the United States had been demarcated in 1848 and modified in 1853, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the area was still characterized by fluidity of movement through a porous boundary.⁷⁵ While the administrative consolidation of the border is indubitably linked to the increasing presence of the INS in the 1910s and the creation of the Border Patrol in the 1920s, medical discourses and practices critical to fixing the boundary line in space began years earlier.

As early as 1883, one of El Paso's first newspapers, the *Lone Star*, reported that *jacales* were breeders of disease.⁷⁶ In 1891, one year before Ellis Island received its first immigrant, the sanitary inspector of the United States Marine Hospital Service (precursor to the USPHS) stationed in El Paso wrote: "The city has no system of sewage or drainage, and for probably two hundred and fifty years the people cast their filth in the streets, and seven-eighths of the population deposit their excreta in close proximity to their houses of residence."⁷⁷ For this inspector "the people" were clearly Mexicans

74. In 1907 Frank W. Berkshire, immigration commissioner in charge of "Chinese matters," was moved to El Paso to oversee its transformation into the "most important immigration station on the Mexican border"; see *El Paso Herald*, 10 June 1907, p. 1. The centrality of El Paso is also stressed in Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*; and García, *Desert Immigrants*.

75. See David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1987), esp. part 1; Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1988), and his more recent *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1994); and Dawn Hall, ed., *Drawing the Borderline: Artist-Explorers of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary Survey* (Albuquerque: The Albuquerque Museum, 1996).

76. García, *Desert Immigrants*, 143.

77. Treasury Department, United States Marine Hospital Service (hereafter USMHS), *Abstracts of Sanitary Reports*, 10 July 1891, p. 315.

—who at the turn of the century were still the majority in El Paso, despite the growing number of Anglo arrivals, mostly from the South and Midwest. Two months earlier he had portrayed pathogens as the primordial inhabitants of Mexico: “I am informed by the oldest inhabitants [of Juárez] that smallpox has been prevalent in their community from time immemorial.”⁷⁸ The inspector used the voice of science and medicine to sanction notions of racial difference that were bolstered by a cluster of discourses—sanitarianism, evolutionism, manifest destiny, and “memories of the Alamo.” In so doing he marked Mexicans as foreign and contaminated. The attribution of disease to Mexico and Mexicans was reiterated in 1898. At this time the sanitary inspector recommended that a quarantine and mandatory smallpox vaccinations be imposed on Juárez during the coming winter months, when increasingly cramped living quarters might give rise to higher levels of infectious disease. He carped that “there is no system of sewerage in Juarez, the natives don’t even use cesspools.”⁷⁹ Sanitary officers at the turn of the century used the language of dirt and morbidity to temporarily distance Mexico and Mexicans from the United States. Juárez, in the words of Anne McClintock, became an “anachronistic space.”⁸⁰

Desired as laborers by the railroads, industries, and agribusinesses in the Southwest and major cities and yet excluded by a nationalistic nativism based on ever more narcissistic definitions of whiteness, Mexicans occupied a literal and figurative threshold. In the early 1900s, when the Immigration Service established its Southwestern headquarters in El Paso, its concern was not with “the Mexican,” but with Chinese, Eastern European, and Mediterranean immigrants, groups that were the primary targets of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Disease Act of 1891, and the Immigration Act of 1903. Within the national imaginary, El Paso had become the “back door” through which, according to special immigration officer Marcus Braun, “diseased, criminal and other classes of immigrants who have failed to get in through the regular ports” were streaming into the United States.⁸¹ The voluminous records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service reveal that during this time Mexicans

78. USMHS, *Abstracts of Sanitary Reports*, 31 Mar. 1891, p. 115.

79. *El Paso Herald*, 29 Dec. 1898, p. 7.

80. McClintock uses this term in conjunction with “panoptical time” to conceptualize the ways in which British colonizers constructed, stratified, and mapped inhabitants, lands, and practices in the colonies. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), esp. part 1.

81. *El Paso Herald*, 25 Nov. 1905, p. 2.

crossed over the river from Juárez virtually unimpeded. In fact, Greeks and Syrians often struggled to master enough rudimentary Spanish to cross the border as *mexicanos*.⁸²

Dozens of border residents interviewed by the Institute of Oral History concur that during the early 1900s passage across the Santa Fe Street Bridge was not hindered; no sense of “here” and “there” existed. Cleofas Calleros, who for many years worked to naturalize Mexicans on behalf of El Paso’s Catholic charities, remembers somewhat nostalgically, and from a somewhat privileged economic status, that “there were no restrictions as to crossing the bridge, or passports or anything like that. Everyone was happy, coming and going without any customs restrictions, any immigration restrictions, any health department restrictions. We were a happy lot. . . . All you had to do coming from Mexico, if you were a Mexican citizen, was to report at the immigration office on the American side—give your name, the place of your birth, and where you were going to.”⁸³ However, as the city expanded, the Mexican Revolution raged on, and the El Paso Anglo elite began to set down roots in the city they hailed as the “Gateway” to Mexico, the maintenance of boundaries became more imperative.

One arena that consistently troubled the El Paso Anglo elite was prostitution and gambling, both of which had flourished in Juárez and El Paso for decades. Although the red-light district was repeatedly vilified and closed down, a thriving world of sex workers and illicit gains continued to characterize El Paso and surrounding towns. Beginning in 1885 “ladies of the night” were required to pay monthly registration fees and were limited to working certain streets.⁸⁴ A decade later prostitutes were relegated to the “tenderloin” district near Utah Street, the only section of the urban landscape where their visibility was countenanced by municipal authority.⁸⁵ During the summer of 1916, while Pershing was tracking Villa in northern Mexico and medical officials were policing Chihuahuaita and urging the imposition of a quarantine, the local government tried again to relocate the “reservation,” as the red-light district had come to be known. This fear and obsession with the prostitute and

82. See the microfilm records of National Archives, Washington, D.C., the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85 (hereafter NA, INS, RG 85), Series A, part 2, Mexican Immigration, 1906–1930, casefiles 51423/1, 51423/1A, and 51463/B.

83. Transcription of tape 157, interview with Cleofas Calleros by Oscar J. Martínez, 14 Sept. 1972, UTEP-IOH, p. 9.

84. Metz, *El Paso Chronicles*, 95, 99.

85. *Ibid.*, 124.

the city's slums moved along the same social axis as the local elite's pathologization of Mexico, Mexican bodies, and the *jacales* of Chihuahuita.

In 1917, for example, while Pierce and Tappan were disinfecting and inoculating migrants at the Santa Fe Street Bridge, the city physician T. C. Galloway and the local doctor Hugh White drafted a plan, backed by the mayor, to spend \$6,000 building public baths and laundries in Chihuahuita. Galloway told the *El Paso Herald* that he wished to provide 5,000 baths a week to Mexicans residing in "lower El Paso."⁸⁶ If Mexicans were required to cleanse themselves and their garments regularly, "there would be no typhus except such as might be brought here by uncleanly persons arriving in the city from Mexico or other places where typhus might happen to be prevalent. Other diseases fostered by filth could be checked in the same way. Living would be safer and more pleasant."⁸⁷ In El Paso the public bathing movement—a hallmark of progressivism's concern to instill a desire for bodily regulation among newly arrived immigrants to cities such as New York and Chicago—became intertwined with the racializing practices of quarantine as they played out across the Santa Fe Street Bridge and within El Paso and its environs.⁸⁸ Moreover, although seemingly absent, the corporeal *persona* of the idealized citizen was constructed through such configurations of urban racialized and gendered space.

This was certainly the case with the icon of national strength, the male soldier. In his cultural and social history of venereal disease, Allan Brandt argues that during the mid-1910s fears about the effects of onanism, syphilis, and prostitution on the body of the virile soldier gestated on the Mexican border.⁸⁹ This concern with bodily discipline and unbridled, degenerate sexuality led the YMCA to dispatch brigades to moralize the troop encampments, in addition to sending two health workers to the border to survey and assess conditions of vice.⁹⁰ Dr. M. J. Exner, who spent seven weeks evaluating the

86. *El Paso Herald*, 11 May 1917, p. 6.

87. *Ibid.*

88. On the public bathing movement as a dimension of United States progressivism, see Marilyn Thornton Williams, *Washing "The Great Unwashed": Public Baths in Urban America, 1840–1920* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1991); David Glassberg, "The Design of Reform: The Public Bath Movement in America," in *Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health*, 3d rev. ed., eds. Judith Walzer Leavitt and Ronald L. Numbers (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

89. See Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880*, expanded ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), chap. 2.

90. See M. J. Exner, "Prostitution in its Relation to the Army on the Mexican Border," *Social Hygiene* 3 (1917); and, in the same issue, Elizabeth Boies, "The Girls on the Border and What They Did for the Militia."

vagaries of camp life, found “soldiers waiting in long lines to visit women of ‘very low grade’”⁹¹ and warned that “from the standpoint of military strength and efficiency, such waste is serious.”⁹² By succumbing to such temptations of the flesh in “an environment which only those who were powerfully fortified by moral principle and will could withstand,” the soldiers jeopardized the nation’s prowess.⁹³ While young male soldiers were encouraged to delve into the primitive masculinity of the “frontier”—symbolized by Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders—they were also admonished to harness and master that energy in the name of “civilization.”⁹⁴

These concerns moved back and forth from body to body across local and national landscapes. Just as restraint was urged upon the male body for the purpose of cultivating modern masculinity, so too were women urged to expunge impurities from self and the domestic sphere. For example, one month into the quarantine Pierce found time to attend a sanitation meeting at the Woman’s Club held to welcome W. M. Martin of the Rockefeller Foundation during his visit to the frontier city. Martin extolled the virtues of cleanliness and told El Paso’s female elite that “a home without a bath and more preferably a shower, is menace to the community.”⁹⁵ Praising and expounding the scientific knowledge gained by the medical corps of the United States Army in combating yellow fever during the Spanish–American War, and the discovery that the mosquito transmitted the disease by carrying infected human blood from victim to victim, Martin proclaimed that “the Panama Canal is a standing demonstration of the control of science over disease, which is filth.”⁹⁶ Martin called upon women to sanitize the perimeters of their homes, “to preach and practice cleanliness, to insist upon clean front and back yards, and to use their influence to demand sanitary surroundings for the children of the entire city.”⁹⁷ Women were instructed that the purity of the community and city rested in their hands, and Pierce linked the project of the quarantine to the surveillance of Mexican bodies in Anglo homes. A newspaper reported him

91. Cited in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 54.

92. Exner, “Prostitution,” 205.

93. *Ibid.*, 206.

94. For a fascinating exploration of Teddy Roosevelt, the “strenuous life,” primitivism and masculinity, see Gail L. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. chap. 5.

95. *El Paso Herald*, 1 Feb. 1917, p. 10.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*

as urging “every woman to see to the cleanliness of the Mexican labor employed about her home, saying that in this way she would not only be protecting herself and her family, but cooperating with the sanitary officers in the problem of educating the Mexican people in cleanliness.”⁹⁸

Throughout the 1910s, then, the El Paso Anglo elite constructed multiple boundaries that were simultaneously racialized and medicalized. In the popular memory of El Paso residents, the construction of the border as a boundary that divided Mexico from the United States was connected most intimately to the implementation of the quarantine and the somatic invasion symbolized by disinfection and the medical exam. Although the voice of Carmelita Torres—described in the local press as an “auburn-haired amazon” who “protested against being bathed and incited the other passengers on the car to disembark and to return to Mexico and not to stand for the restrictions which the Americans had put in force”—is irretrievable, the disinfection process appears in the social memory of other border residents as a moment of bodily desecration.⁹⁹

One Mexican woman, remembering her husband’s accounts of the quarantine, told an interviewer that “the only thing they did [in the immigration building] was bathe them [the immigrants]. . . . They bathed them and took off their clothes, which were washed somewhere else and returned all wrinkled.” All this, as the woman recalled, because “they thought [Mexicans] were bringing microbes or something like that over from Mexico.”¹⁰⁰ For José Burciaga, who came to El Paso in 1907 and frequently crossed the border, the quarantine marked the transformation of the bridge into an obstacle. It translated the boundary line into a construct that was verified and enacted upon the body itself. Noting that the disinfection plant was right next to the bridge, Burciaga told his interviewer: “You see, when someone entered they doused him with something. What a nightmare! And then there was more: men, women, they shaved everyone. . . . They bathed everyone, and after the bath they doused you with cryolite [sodium aluminum flouride], comprised of some sort of

98. Ibid. It is important to note that these comments reflect the ongoing credence given to “filth” or miasmatic theories of disease, which coexisted sometimes uneasily with new bacteriological doctrines.

99. First quote is from the *El Paso Times*, 29 Jan. 1917, p. 1; the second is from the *El Paso Herald*, evening edition, p. 5.

100. Tape 722, interview with Señora X by Maria Nuckolls, 7 Dec. 1979, UTEP-IOH. Portions of this interview are also cited in Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, chap. 2.



Photo 1: Steam disinfection of clothing at the Santa Fe Street Station. Photo included in letter from C. C. Pierce to Surgeon General, 16 Feb. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897–1923, file 1248.

substance, it was strong.”¹⁰¹ Felix López Urdiales, who resided in Juárez, stopped coming to the United States in the 1920s, apparently in response to the difficulties that the quarantine presented. He recalled that the plant, which included “some baths, some showers, and a boiler,” was underneath the bridge. Remarking that his steamed clothing was always returned wrinkled, he also stressed that to renew their quarantine card laborers who regularly crossed the border had to undergo disinfection once a week: “It was a requirement for anyone who wanted to work.”¹⁰²

101. The interviewee is probably referring to cynaogen or cresole, since there is no explicit reference to cryolite in the USPHS records. Tape 143, Interview with José Cruz Burciaga by Oscar J. Martínez, 16 Feb. 1974, UTEP-IOH. This procedure of card renewal is also mentioned by Pierce as well as in INS and USPHS records. The local press also reported the existence of several “habitual bathers” who subjected themselves to up to five or six disinfections a day in order to peddle cards.

102. Transcription of tape 144C, interview with Felix López Urdiales by Oscar J. Martínez, 22 Feb. 1974, UTEP-IOH, pp. 5–6.

The sense of invasion is evoked by the rumors that abounded in Juárez the day the quarantine was announced. According to the El Paso papers, “stories that Mexican women were burned to death in the gasoline baths, that American soldiers had photographed the women when they were stripped for their baths and that outrages had been committed on the women by American soldiers were said to have been circulated among the ignorant class in Juárez.”¹⁰³ Revealing that passage through the threshold of the disinfection plant simultaneously racialized, gendered, and nationalized, the stories that circulated in Juárez demonstrate that the construction of the boundary line had less to do with edicts from Washington and more to do with the specific unfolding of strategies of modernity along and across the deserts and rivers of the Southwest. For bridge-crossers long accustomed to a certain freedom of movement, the intrusive gaze of the camera, the threat of possible violation, and the specter of another “holocaust” now came to define and characterize the “other side.”

The border quarantine is significant for several reasons. It helped to solidify a boundary line that had previously been much more indistinct. In so doing, it helped to racialize inhabitants of Mexico as *Mexicans* and to demarcate northern Mexico as a distinct geographical entity, despite its topographic and climatic similarity to southern Texas. The quarantine was also significant because the procedures it introduced were not temporary. They continued through the 1920s despite the waivers on Mexican migrant labor that were issued following the passage of the Immigration Law of 1917.¹⁰⁴ For example,

103. *El Paso Herald*, 29 Jan. 1917, evening edition, p. 5. Another dimension of this story is how in Mexico contests over boundary maintenance became a question of sovereignty. On January 30, 1917, the Mexican consul general in San Francisco wrote to Secretary of State Lansing demanding to know why a quarantine had been established “without any justified cause”; see Ramón P. de Negri to Robert Lansing, 30 Jan. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897–1923, file 1248. Such protests continued for months. Furthermore, the Mexican government retaliated, declaring that they would disinfect their own citizens and distribute their own certifications in Juárez, thus fully reappropriating the plant Pierce had been using throughout 1916. Pierce announced that such certificates would be valid only for a few days. Toward the end of February 1917, when it became clear that the quarantine was not going to end any time soon, the Mexican government began a retaliatory quarantine against persons coming into Juárez.

104. This law required that immigrants at all designated points of entry take a literacy test, pay an eight-dollar head tax, and pass a medical examination. In the context of an emergent wartime economy, however, Southwestern industrialists and growers were able to convince Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson to waive these stipulations for Mexican laborers until 1921.



Photo 2: Mexicans waiting to be deloused at the front end of the El Paso disinfection station. Photo included in letter from C. C. Pierce to Surgeon General, 16 Feb. 1917, NACP, USPHS, RG 90, CF 1897–1923, file 1248.

one month after the opening of the Santa Fe Street Bridge plant, Pierce announced that similar sanitation plants would be established at Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Brownsville.¹⁰⁵ That these plants were erected and in operation is evidenced by a series of responses from immigration officers to Secretary of Labor James J. Davis in the early 1920s. Seeking to ensure that “the immigration law must be enforced on the Mexican border as fully in every detail, including medical examination, as at any Atlantic or Pacific seaport,” Davis sent inquiries to the directors of all inspection stations in Arizona, California, and Texas.¹⁰⁶ Almost every one sent back lengthy testaments that detailed procedures at their ports of entry. In meticulous detail, El Paso’s acting assistant surgeon, Irving McNeil, elaborated on the modus operandi at El Paso’s immi-

105. *El Paso Herald*, 26 Feb. 1917, p. 4.

106. James J. Davis, “Memorandum for the Commissioner General of Immigration,” 29 Feb. 1924, NA, INS, RG 85, Series A, part 2, microfilm of casefile 52903/29. His original request was sent on 17 Nov. 1923.

gration center. Noting that the appearance and “class status” of 90 percent of all arrivals targeted them for disinfection, McNeil wrote that “the line inspection for the Immigration Service is governed by the regulations covering the medical inspection of aliens prepared under the direction of the Surgeon General, with certain modifications at this port, on account of the fact that the arriving alien who goes through the bathhouse at the disinfecting plant is previously thoroughly inspected while naked, by a trained and experienced attendant, male or female, as the case may be, and, if necessary, by a medical officer as well.” McNeil continued with the same litany of procedures—showers, steaming, vaccinations, and scrutiny—that had been recited by Pierce in 1917. By 1923 the weekly disinfection and renewal of quarantine cards had become thoroughly routinized. In McNeil’s words: “The working classes from the neighboring Mexican cities known as ‘locals’ are required to pass through the disinfecting plant once a week. A bath certificate is issued to these and taken up at the expiration of a week, a new one being issued after each disinfection.”¹⁰⁷ Entry into the United States had become a highly medicalized conversion that relied on middle-level governmental and public health officials who racialized, counted, and often excluded entrants. It was upon a repertoire of theories and practices about the body and disease that the Immigration and Naturalization Service built its operations beginning in 1917. A closer look at medicalization and immigration at the border suggests that some of the technologies critical to strategies of confinement, racialization, and the inscription of boundaries moved from the southern border of the United States to its coasts, not the other way around. In 1921 a reporter for *Survey Graphic* who had traveled to El Paso to see the quarantine criticized its deplorable and squalid facilities and then reminded her readers that “speaking of baths it is a noteworthy thing that immigrants through the border stations have been receiving baths and disinfection of clothing for some ten years, while those through the Eastern ports have until very recently come in as they were.”¹⁰⁸

107. Irving McNeil to J. W. Tappan, 22 Dec. 1923, NA, INS, RG 85, Series A, part 2, microfilm of casefile 52903/29. Letters and reports from the NACP, USPHS, RG 90, files 126, 1248, and 2126 show that after Pierce left the border in the late 1910s, Tappan took over the direction of the quarantine and continued to order needed disinfection equipment, deal with the daily logistics of operating the plant, and oversee personnel. Close to ten years later the medical procedures for national prophylaxis as well as the role of public health service doctors in “cleaning up” El Paso’s Mexican quarter are described by Tappan in his 26 Sept. 1926 “Protective Health Measures on the United States–Mexico Border,” *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 87 (1926).

108. Vera L. Sturges, “Mexican Immigrants,” *Survey Graphic*, 2 July 1921, pp. 470–71.

The quarantine also brought into public discourse many of the notions of disease, blood, and hereditary inferiority that would become central to the vocabulary of immigration restrictionists in the 1920s. Medicalization was crucial to the crystallization of boundaries that traversed the urban geography of El Paso, the behaviors of the city's elite, and the demarcation of the edges of the state. Illustrative of biopower's ability to homologize and construct Mexicans is the movement of bodies carried out by Dr. Hugh White. In an oral history interview, his widow described the collaboration between immigration officials and El Paso's medical establishment. Stating that her husband "was a great man to get rid of diseases," Mrs. White then recounted his exhaustive vaccination campaigns: "What my husband did was to gather up the Mexicans by the busload and bathe them in disinfectant at the bridge; and he wouldn't let anybody come over unless they got a bath. He also got all the Mexicans that lived here in El Paso. Because of that nobody got typhus. I remember him coming home and saying, 'You know, Mexicans are the gentlest people in the world.' He had lived in Virginia where the Negroes were. 'If I had tried to take busloads of Negroes, I wouldn't be here now.'"¹⁰⁹ Only after being cleansed—and, in turn, racialized—were Mexicans allowed cross the threshold from diseased body to desired laborer. To a great extent, this doubled embodiment was reinforced by taxonomies of citizenship and science that offered no categories for non-white and non-black persons and populations. Over the ensuing decade, however, as medicalized idioms of difference and disease penetrated the United States Congress and other federal departments, the bounds of this threshold would contract.

Blood and Quotas

During the 1920s two discourses of blood that had been developing over past decades—the medical and the eugenic—converged to frame many of the debates over citizenship, naturalization, and inclusion that enveloped the United States. In 1924 eugenicists such as Harry Laughlin and John B. Trevor worked hand in hand with Congressmen Albert Johnson and John C. Box to secure passage of the National Origins Act, which stipulated a 2 percent quota per nationality according to the figures of the 1890 census. Biased heavily against migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, this legislation also debarred all immigrants from Asia. Latin America and the Caribbean, however, were left

109. Tape 48, interview with Mrs. Hugh White by Leon C. Metz and Robin Fuller, 3 June 1968, UTEP-IOH.

unaffected by these quotas. However, as Mexicans continued to move to the United States, often settling in big cities such as Chicago and St. Louis, nativists and eugenicists redirected their gaze away from the coasts and began to focus specifically on immigrants crossing the Mexican border. Especially in the latter half of the 1920s, arguments aimed at placing infinitesimal quotas on immigrants from Mexico circulated through the chambers of Congress, scientific and popular journals, and the epistolary networks of eugenicists and reformers.¹¹⁰

The science of bacteriology centered on isolating and eradicating the microscopic pathogens that flowed through bodily fluids.¹¹¹ Although the transition from earlier “filth” theories of diseases to those of bacteriology was neither immediate nor smooth, by the first decades of the twentieth century “medical scientists, some of whom completely abandoned the old theories, were convinced that the identification of microorganisms as a single cause of infectious disease would allow them to target specific public health activities to find and eliminate germs.”¹¹² This preoccupation with the secrets of soma was shared by eugenicists, whose concerns were not the actual vectors of disease, but the hidden and hereditary “unit characters” that determined human attributes ranging from degree of skin pigmentation to musical talent, from criminal proclivities to intellectual acumen.¹¹³ When the languages of medicine and eugenics—germs and genes—intertwined in the 1920s, they came together largely through the metaphor of blood, weaving a discursive web of sanguin-

110. For the best analysis of these debates in the context of “Americanization” in the 1920s, see David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), chaps. 2 and 3.

111. On the significance and history of bacteriology in the United States, see John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), chap. 13; Charles Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (New York: MD Publications, 1958; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), chap. 7; and Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), chap. 1.

112. Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary*, 23.

113. One of primary endeavors of the Eugenics Records Office (located in Cold Spring Harbor, New York) was the compilation of *The Trait Book* that, through a classification procedure akin to that of the Dewey decimal system, endeavored to catalog every imaginable trait (from imbecility, to harelip, to chess-playing, to physical deformity) with a complex, branching numerical reference. For an excellent overview, see Garland E. Allen, “The Eugenics Records Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1910–1940,” *Osiris*, 2d ser., 2 (1986). On the discursive similarities between “germ” and “gene,” see Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of “Defective” Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 48–54.

ity that embraced the antinomies of citizen/alien, national/foreign, forward/backward, purity/disease, intelligence/imbecility, and so forth.

Just one year after passage of the National Origins Act and the creation of the United States Border Patrol, Jordan, with knowledge gathered almost ten years earlier in El Paso, responded to a letter sent to him by Davenport bemoaning the leniency of current immigration restrictions. Troubled by what he perceived to be a rising hybrid presence, Jordan stated why he thought the entrance of Mexicans into his home state of California, and the United States as a whole, ought to be more meticulously monitored. "The Mexicans," he declared, "have brought with them bubonic plague, small pox, and typhus fever. While these diseases do not touch the clean living part of the south, they have still kept the health officers very busy and probably diminished by one-half the chief crop of Southern California, winter tourists."¹¹⁴ One month later, in another letter to Davenport, Jordan continued his assault, alleging that "the Mexican peon, who for the most part can never be fit for citizenship . . . is giving our stock a far worse dilution than ever came from Europe."¹¹⁵ The medical analogies between cleanliness and life on the one hand, and pestilence and death on the other, had become integral to the eugenic lexicon and to criteria for national inclusion and exclusion.

Another eugenicist who spoke of blood and prophylaxis was C. M. Goethe. A Sacramento real estate broker and founder of the nationally affiliated and self-financed Eugenics Society of Northern California, Goethe—who corresponded with Jordan for over 20 years—had also traveled to the Mexican border to survey conditions there.¹¹⁶ His trips, however, took place about ten years after those of Pierce and Jordan. Goethe, a member of the national council of *Survey Graphic*, had probably read the steady stream of articles that during the 1910s appeared in this journal about Mexico, Mexicans, typhus, and the El Paso quarantine.¹¹⁷ Perhaps these essays even spurred him to establish the Immigration Study Commission, whose principal task was to discern the extent of the *mestizo* threat to American "seed stock."

By 1928 the proponents of restrictionism had become so vociferous that

114. David Starr Jordan to Charles Davenport, 7 May 1925, APS, Davenport Papers, ms. B:D27.

115. Jordan to Davenport, 1 June 1925, APS, Davenport Papers, ms. B:D27.

116. See the correspondence between Jordan and Goethe in the David Starr Jordan Papers, housed both in the Department of Special Collections and the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University.

117. Beginning in 1918 Goethe is listed as a council member of *Survey Graphic*.

“the House and Senate Immigration committees held concurrent hearings on bills to limit New World immigration.”¹¹⁸ In this context Goethe’s voice was one of the most vitriolic. Two years after returning from one of his border expeditions, Goethe published a short piece in the monthly magazine *Eugenics* entitled “The Influx of Mexican Amerinds.”¹¹⁹ After discussing the dangers posed by different types of pathologized Mexican bodies, Goethe concluded that Mexicans were “eugenically as low-powered as the Negro, . . . from a sanitation standpoint [the Mexican peon is] a menace. He not only does not understand health rules: being a superstitious savage, he resists them.”¹²⁰ After differentiating the “Negro” from the Mexican “peon” through the language of disease and sanitation similar to that of Mrs. White of El Paso, Goethe went on to further emphasize the particular and lethal secrets of the Mexican soma. Describing a young couple who for their honeymoon chose to go “south of the Rio Grande, where so much of the Medieval persisted,” Goethe then used the imagined tragedy that befell them to insist upon closing the “back door” that facilitated Mexican immigration. Three nights after the couple arrived at a tropical spot overflowing with bougainvillea, “the young bride lay tossing with an alarming temperature. Outside her bedroom door, the doctor told the almost frantic bridegroom, ‘It is typhus fever.’ ‘But it cannot be,’ the bridegroom objected, ‘We have been only in the cleanest hotels. See how scrupulously neat our quarters are, tiled floor and all.’ ‘Yes,’ replied the physician, ‘but peon servants like this chambermaid, Mercedes Ramírez, are only too often contagion carriers.’”¹²¹ Goethe’s article, which was reprinted as a broadside for free distribution, reveals the powerful conver-

118. Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 207.

119. Goethe sent Laughlin a photo postcard of the Arizona desert on which he wrote, “Am down here on the Border studying the eugenic aspects of the Mexican immigration problem. One’s reaction to their slums surrounding the Nordic quarters of border towns is that the latter are competing with a rabbit-type birth rate. The more one studies the peon the more one wonders: Did the Conquistadores eliminate the thinkers when he destroyed the Aztec priests and soldiers?” Goethe to Laughlin, Feb. 1927, Truman State University, Kirksville, Missouri, Special Collections, Papers of Harry H. Laughlin (hereafter TSU-Laughlin), box C-4-1. Also cited by Randall D. Bird and Garland Allen, “The J. H. B. Archive Report: The Papers of Harry Hamilton Laughlin, Eugenicist,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 14 (1981), who discuss the considerable correspondence between Laughlin and Goethe. Newspaper clippings and other ephemera from Goethe’s border travels are housed at California State University, Sacramento, Special Collections, Papers of Charles Matthias Goethe, box 85-F-2, scrapbook 1. They show that he surveyed the border regions of both California and Arizona.

120. C. M. Goethe, “The Influx of Mexican Amerinds,” *Eugenics* 2, no. 1 (1929): 6–9.

121. *Ibid.*, 6.

gence of two discourses on blood—the medical and the eugenic. Despite the fact that they often seemed healthy, Mexicans are portrayed as the silent carriers of deadly diseases. If allowed to enter the bounds of the United States body politic, here represented by a heterosexual couple at the sacred moment when procreation is initiated, the propagation of the “American” family would be doomed. Furthermore, Goethe continually reiterated that the oversexed tendencies—what eugenicists were fond of terming “differential fecundity”—of Mexicans was threatening to overtake and dilute the “superior stock” of the United States “bloodstream.”

Harry Laughlin—whom Albert Johnson, the nativist and sinophobic Republican congressman from Seattle, appointed as the “expert eugenical agent” of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1921—also had strong opinions about sanguinity.¹²² Throughout the 1920s—with the support of both Johnson and the restrictionist congressman from east Texas, John C. Box—Laughlin provided testimony, carried out studies, penned reports evincing the nation’s need to eradicate bad “germ plasm,” and expounded on the need for a national census registry. In the late 1920s, as he became more and more preoccupied with definitions of whiteness, Laughlin proposed to undertake a trip to the border on behalf of the so-called Citizens Committee, apparently formed by Box. Laughlin requested money from the Carnegie Institution, which was then funding the Eugenics Records Office, to travel to the border to “find out the relative amount of race-crossing between American men and Mexican women and between Mexican men and American women.”¹²³ The interpenetration of medicine and eugenics is revealed in the responses to two of Laughlin’s questionnaires that he forwarded to Box, along with other papers. Both respondents were from El Paso. One, claiming to be a physician with a local practice of 30 years, furnished in-depth answers to all the questions. In response to the query, “What contagious diseases have they?” this physician stated that Mexicans mainly suffered from tuberculosis, although “smallpox is constantly bobbing up here along the border and a constant fight by health authorities is the result. We have had typhus fever on more than one occasion, brought directly from Mexico. They bring disease into American families but Americans must use them because there are no others, and besides, they work cheap. The ‘Mexican situation’ has been a problem for the El Paso county Medical Society for years. Instead of solving the

122. By the mid-1920s, Johnson was both a member of the American Eugenics Society and president of its affiliated Eugenics Research Association.

123. Laughlin to John C. Merriman, 24 Sept. 1929, TSU-Laughlin, box C-4-6.

problem we are getting worse.”¹²⁴ Laughlin interwove these claims about disease with the “results” of IQ tests and other forms of eugenic measurement in stressing the dire need to exclude Mexicans. His proposals and ruminations provided much of the substance for the bills proposed by Box throughout the 1920s to restrict immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean according to a quota system.

Aside from Johnson, Box, Laughlin, Jordan, and Goethe, another man interested in “solving the problem” was James J. Davis, secretary of the Department of Labor from 1921 to 1930, whose own article, “The Story of the Year in Immigration,” had preceded Goethe’s “Influx of Mexican Amerinds” in the January 1929 issue of *Eugenics*. A fervent advocate of quotas for all immigrants from Latin America, Davis’s dilemma rested on the fact that the Mendelian logic of eugenics made it nearly impossible to classify—and hence definitively debar—any “race” not viewed as pure.¹²⁵ Basing their arguments on a variant of the “one-drop rule” that substituted “Amerind” for black blood, eugenicists “maintained that inasmuch as Mexicans were racially of Indian stock, federal law prohibited both their naturalization and their immigration.”¹²⁶ Citing an 1875 law that limited citizenship to white persons and free persons of African descent, eugenicists frequently argued that Mexicans were not eligible for national belonging and should be totally excluded. Such proposals, however, were often impeded by an 1897 United States district court case, *In re Rodriguez*, in which Rodríguez secured his rights to citizenship and naturalization, “despite the court’s belief he was not White,” on the basis of the stipulations of

124. “Questions Pertaining to Mexican Immigration to be Answered by Persons Interested in Public Health,” included in John C. Box to Laughlin, 29 Jan. 1930, TSU-Laughlin, box C-4-1.

125. Following their interpretations of Mendelian genetics, many United States eugenicists believed that human traits were defined by specific “unit characters” that were innate. “Race,” or, more precisely, “racial characteristics,” which was frequently conflated with nationality, was seen as a fixed “unit character,” best expressed in its pure form. For these reasons, eugenicists rejected the metaphor of the “melting pot” as a confused and degenerating mixture of separate and incompatible “races.” As Neil Foley has eloquently shown in his study of the triangulated relationship between Mexicans, African Americans, and Anglos in central Texas, eugenicists’ arguments linked poor whites, Mexican agricultural workers, and other persons of color as hybrid “races” that threatened to destabilize “whiteness” and the phenotypical boundaries of Jim Crow racism. See Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997).

126. Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 135.

the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹²⁷ Mexicans thus were both inside and outside the body politic in the regnant imaginary. Davis, who had once stated that “it would be impossible for the most learned and experienced ethnologist or anthropologist to classify or determine their [Mexicans’] racial origin,” sought a resolution to this conundrum.¹²⁸

For this reason, a year after the passage of the National Origins Act, Davis commissioned a study by Robert F. Foerster, professor of economics at Princeton University, on the need for quota limitations on migration from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Entitled *The Racial Problems Involved in Immigration from Latin America and the West Indies to the United States*, this report provided statistical material and analysis to support restricting the immigration of Latin Americans. Of a thirty-three page country by country analysis, eight pages were dedicated to Mexico. Foerster concluded that Mexicans, given their biological incapacities, were unfit for governance and that “no effective democracy resting on universal suffrage can come quickly in a country whose population is still so retrograde as the Mexican in the essential prerequisites of democracy.”¹²⁹ His report ended with a call to reiterate the Nordic bias of the 1924 National Origins Act by excluding all potential immigrants who did not meet the “criterion for immigration.” This would effectively bar all the populations he had considered in the commissioned study. Following a reasoning repeated by many eugenicists and restrictionists, Foerster categorized Mexicans as “aliens” and “Amerinds,” a mongrelized “race” that was neither “white” nor “black.”

Such classificatory gymnastics reflected eugenicists’ anxiousness to arrive at increasingly precise definitions of whiteness. This is apparent in the papers of Laughlin. In these, among a batch of typed outlines and fragments dealing with Mexican immigration, is a particularly revealing paragraph in which he suggested that “only white persons shall be admitted into the United States as immigrants, or naturalized as citizens thereof.” He then carefully defined a

127. See Ian F. Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Constructions of Race* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1996), 61. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted citizenship rights to all Mexicans living on United States territory after annexation; beginning in the late nineteenth century, the juridical status of Mexicans in the Southwest often conflicted with understandings of citizenship based on “race” and complicated definitions of “whiteness.”

128. *Ibid.*, 136–37.

129. Robert F. Foerster, *The Racial Problems Involved in Immigration from Latin America and the West Indies to the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1925), 14.

white person “as one, at least thirty-one thirty-seconds (or all) of whose ancestors are of Caucasian stocks.”¹³⁰ Citizenship and inclusion within the body politic thus became a question of at least five generations of “pure” blood. With the assistance of Congressman Johnson, who “convinced Secretary of Commerce Robert P. Lamont to have his census director classify Mexicans in a separate racial category in the 1930 census,” this distinction was written into law, although in 1940 the category of *Mexican* again disappeared from the United States census.¹³¹

Conclusion: Colonial Beginnings, Metropolitan Endings

During the 1920s the strength of Southwestern growers had stymied eugenicists’ calls for restrictionism.¹³² A diminishing concern to exclude Mexican immigrants was connected to several other important factors. One was the enactment of an INS policy in the 1920s to limit entrance and process immigrants at consular offices in Mexico. Another was the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and led to both the voluntary and coerced repatriation of Mexicans. Nonetheless, during the early twentieth century the border between Mexico and the United States became fixed and, after 1924, monitored by the Border Patrol. Militarization and medicalization converged and overlapped in El Paso during the 1910s as Pershing and Pierce enacted distinct yet interconnected strategies of bodily pursuit and violence. Shaped by their colonial pasts, both men were pivotal to the construction of the Mexican border and the delimitation of the United States as an empire and metropole. Moreover, the discourses and practices of medicine and social control that were critical to inventing multiple boundaries in the 1910s were folded into eugenic theories of difference and moved into the national imaginary in the 1920s. The exhortations of Jordan, Goethe, and Laughlin, which merged the language of germs and genes, pathologized the extremities of the body politic and helped to shape restrictive leg-

130. “Be It Enacted,” TSU-Laughlin, box C-4-5.

131. Reisler, *By the Sweat of Their Brow*, 137.

132. Quota limitations were not placed on Mexican immigration until 1976. In 1965 a limit of 120,000 had been placed on the number of immigrants from the Western Hemisphere; it was not until Congressman Rodino spearheaded a new brand of restrictionism in the 1970s that a cap on Mexicans was put into place, one based on “family reunification” that limited migration to 20,000 individuals. For an overview of Mexican immigration in the twentieth century, see James D. Cockcroft, *Outlaws in the Promised Land: Mexican Immigrant Workers and America’s Future* (New York: Grove Press, 1986).

isolation as well as justify the establishment of the Border Patrol in 1924. Mexicans were racially marked as they passed through concrete and imagined thresholds. In the context of Mendelian eugenics their liminal position as mestizos made them ineligible for whiteness and yet unclassifiable according to earlier racial distinctions. Discourses of blood thus produced a new racialized group at once non-white *and* non-black, while helping to delimit Mexico as a totally foreign land.